

Graduate Level Credit for Resident EWS Students

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In 1959, "the only credential...required was the boldness to dream."¹ Today it takes academic credentials to open doors. In 2008, the Marine Corps selected 189 Marines with the boldness to dream to attend the Expeditionary Warfare School (EWS) resident course in Quantico, VA. The same academic year, 2,272 Marines enrolled in the nonresident EWS seminar course. The Marine Corps makes no distinction for promotion purposes in regard to which method a Marine chooses to complete his or her professional military education (PME) requirement. Even with the obvious educational advantage of attending the resident course, no educational benefit (i.e., master's degree) is associated. Because of the vast differences in the time and quality of education of the two courses, Marine Corps University (MCU) should seek graduate level credit for the resident EWS class.

History

Both the resident and the nonresident EWS courses provide company grade officers with the chance to achieve their career level PME requirement. Both courses also ensure that US Code: Title 10 educational requirements are met.² A primary

¹ Moss Hart, quoted in Bartlett's Familiar Quotations.

² Lieutenant Colonel Michael Palermo, EWS Chief Instructor, interview by author, 17 December 2008.

distinction, however, is that the nonresident course is regularly updated in an attempt to make it more comparable to the resident course.

The Marine Corps has made several attempts over the past ten years to improve the nonresident EWS course. In 1997 the College of Continuing Education (CCE) was established as the Marine Corps advocate for officer distance professional military education.³ A voluntary seminar program was established for EWS this same year. With CCE, students could choose to complete the course via seminar or the traditional "box of books."

In May of 2005, MCU announced the creation of the new EWS Distance Education Program (DEP) to bring captain nonresident PME closer in line with what was being taught at the resident course⁴. In July 2007 students were no longer given the option to choose the "box of books" nonresident PME method to become PME complete. They were now required to attend the EWS seminar course onsite or on-line. This transformation strategy called the "Son of Seminar" initiative attempted to build on the success of the volunteer seminar program established in 1997.⁵

³ Terrence Kerrigan and James Van Zummeren, "Transforming Officer Distance Professional Military Education," *Marine Corps Gazette* 90, no. 2 (2006): 24.

⁴ Brian Russell, "The Confusing State of PME for Captains," *Marine Corps Gazette* 90, no. 10 (2006): 40.

⁵ Kerrigan and Zummeren, 23.

Most recently in December 2008, MARADMIN 6880 announced that Marines attending nonresident PME would be extended the opportunity to attend fall OFEC (officer field expansion course) with resident EWS students.⁶

In short, the goal over the past ten years has been to make the nonresident EWS course more comparable to its resident counterpart. The College of Continuing Education has done an outstanding job of improving the curriculum as well as the instruction style of the nonresident course. In spite of all the efforts, however, it still falls incredibly short of the resident course.

Curriculum

Instruction Time

Though the EWS Distance Education Program (EWSDEP) department works for the College of Continuing Education, the Commander of EWS is responsible for all career level PME. This includes nonresident PME. The EWSDEP department is co-located at the Expeditionary Warfare School in Quantico, VA. This co-location allows EWSDEP department to work closely with the curriculum developers at the schoolhouse to ensure that the two curriculums match as closely as possible. Another way of doing

⁶ MARADMIN 6880, retrieved from website, URL: <www.usmc.mil>. 16 Dec 2008.

this is through annual Course Content Review Boards (CCRB). The diagrams below depict how the curriculum of the two courses compare based on recent CCRB's of both courses.

| | Resident EWS | Nonresident EWS (Seminar) | Nonresident EWS (Reading) |
|----------------|-----------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Warfighting | 52 | 61 | 41 |
| Information | 11 | 10 | 6 |
| MCP | 97.5 | 30 | 20 |
| MAGTF Ops | 400.5 | 99 | 40 |
| Expeditionary | 171.5 | 91 | 49 |
| Command and | 50.5 | 0 | 0 |
| Leadership | 38.5 | 0 | 0 |
| Battle Studies | 47 | 0 | 0 |
| Professional | 103 | 0 | 0 |
| Communications | 134 | 0 | 0 |
| Misc. | 318 | 0 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 1,423.5 | 291 | 156 |

Table (1): Resident vs Nonresident course hours.

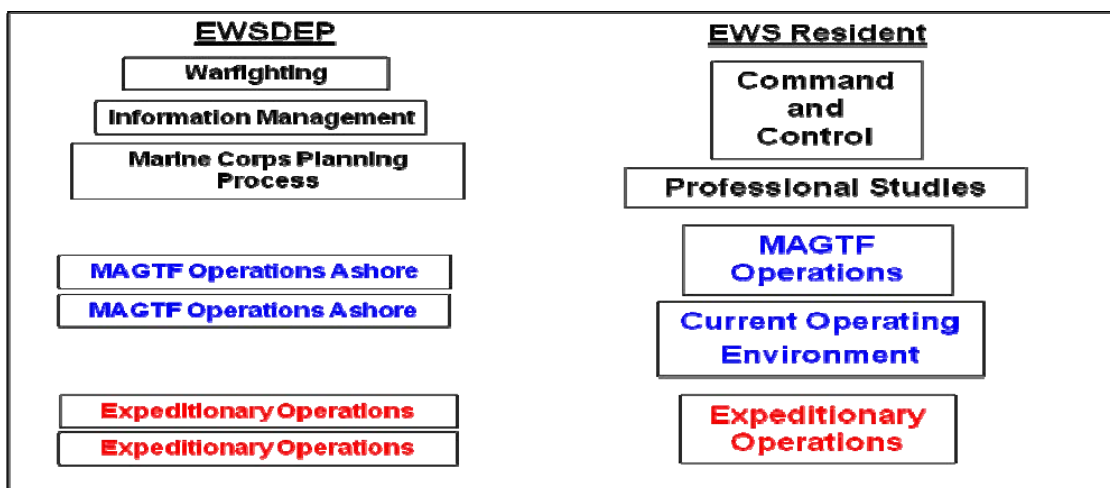


Figure (1): Distribution of student learning outcomes.

EWS resident students receive a curriculum that is broken into three major phases. These phases address the same material

that the distance program addresses over two academic years. Resident students also receive instruction in professional studies and the current operating environment. The resident course goes into much greater detail in all areas to include an extensive practical exercise program.⁷ Because EWS is a nine-month school and the seminar course is conducted in two-hour classes per week for 68 weeks, a large disparity in the hours of instruction is expected. That disparity becomes even larger if one assumes that many nonresident students do not complete as much of the required reading that resident students complete.

Quality of Instruction

Students attending the EWS seminar course are not held to the same standard as their resident school counterparts. Instructors often realize that students attending the seminar have a day job that keeps them busy. Field exercises and deployment work ups are all taken into account by the instructors. Often times seminar instructors are or were instructors at the resident school themselves.

In the very recent past, all of the seminar tests were multiple-choice compared with all short answer tests at the resident school. The newest version of the seminar course

⁷ Sean Griffin, "Balancing PME and Training," *Marine Corps Gazette* 90, no. 12 (2006): 38.

requires its students to take many of the same tests as their resident counterparts, although the expectations are often not the same. For example, in both courses the warfighting exam is a scenario based test that requires critical thinking, has subjective grading, and requires the instructor to decide whether or not the student made good decisions and sufficiently answered the questions.

Students at the resident course get several hours of instruction, class room discussions, and practical application in this process before taking the exam. Instructors expect that students have a good understanding of the process and grade them accordingly. This is not the case in the nonresident course. Students are not expected to understand the process completely because they do not get the practical application time required to get the full grasp of the process. Both students pass; however, the quality of instruction of the resident student is exceedingly better.

Accreditation

Education, not training, is a requirement for any type of college accreditation program. Education and training are sometimes incorrectly used interchangeably. While education

deals with development of the mind and intellect, training deals with developing specific skills.⁸

Army Accreditation Program

The Army already provides accreditation for comparable career-level courses. The Army Captains' Career Course (ACCC) is the best example. In an interview with Major Bronzi, the current academics section head at EWS and graduate of the Army Artillery School Captains' Career Course, he stated the following in a comparison of the Army and USMC courses:

The Army course puts a substantively higher emphasis on technical expertise and training than EWS does. The comparison is that Army captains spend time learning their respective planning process, and then move right into training and technical expertise, while EWS is not nearly as technical and its students spend considerably more time in an educational vice a training academic environment.⁹

The deduction is that although Army career-level courses are more technical than EWS, they still provide enough education to establish a sound accreditation program. Marine captains selected to attend Army career courses are considered PME complete upon graduation. Additionally, they benefit from the

⁸Dr. Samuel Blumenfeld, World Net Daily Commentary, "Education vs Training," web-only essay, 07 Feb 2000, URL: <www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp>, Accessed 13 Dec 2008.

⁹ Major Christopher Bronzi, Academics Operations Section Head for EWS, interview by the author, 16 Dec 2008.

accreditation program that the Army has established with Webster University.

The Army has a cooperative Master's Degree Program with Webster University for its career courses. Webster has published advising papers to explain how the education gained at the Army courses translates into credits for different graduate level degrees at the university. The three most common degree programs associated with the career courses are Master of Business Administration (MBA), Master of Arts in Human Resources Development (HRDV), and Master of Arts in Management and Leadership (MGTL).

Specifically looking at the Army Infantry Captains' Career Course (ICCC) and a Webster University Master of Human Resource Development degree, the following is true:

The HRDV Masters Degree requires satisfactory completion of 36 credit hours. Qualified ICCC graduates enrolled in the Masters of HRDV program are awarded 12 semester hours of transfer credits, which is applied as 3 semester hours of core substitutes and 9 hours of elective courses.¹⁰

Table (2) below further illustrates the benefits of the Army Cooperative Degree Program.

¹⁰ Webster University, Military Opportunities, Cooperative Degree Program, link, URL: <www.webster.edu/military/cooperative.shtml>, accessed 10 December 2008.

| | Credits Required for Degree | Credits Received from ICC | Credits Remaining for Degree |
|------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| MBA | 36 | 9 | 27 |
| HRDV | 36 | 12 | 24 |
| MCTL | 36 | 12 | 24 |

Table (2): Available credits by degree program for completion of the ICC course.

One could reason that the Army places a greater value on higher education for its company grade officers than the Marine Corps does. As it stands, the Marine Corps is projecting the message that it believes in higher education, but not until one reaches the grade of major and, therefore, more likely to stick around for the long haul. MARADMIN 006/00 states that "Accreditation has validated the quality of MCU as an educational institution and will enable it to participate more fully as a partner in the world of higher education."¹¹ Unfortunately, this assessment does not apply to EWS, which begs the question why is the quality of EWS not worth validating.

MCU Accreditation Program

The process to receive accreditation is already in place. Marine Corps University went through a long and vigorous process to become a certified college authorized to grant its current

¹¹ MARADMIN 0600/00, retrieved from website, URL: <www.usmc.mil>. 14 Dec 2008.

degrees. According to MARADMIN 006/00, the Marine Corps University was granted accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) on December 7, 1999.¹² However, the first baby steps were taken in this direction almost 10 years prior.

The fact that MCU endured the ten year process to be granted accreditation shows the value that Training and Education Command and the Marine Corps places on higher education for its majors and above. It's been eight years since MCU received initial accreditation. The school is now well established and well on its way to becoming a highly respected institution in the world of higher education. The question now becomes how much longer before the same value is placed on higher education for captains?

Counter Arguments

Command and Staff College

There is no need to provide EWS graduates with any type of graduate level credit because they can receive a master's degree at Command and Staff College when they return in three to six years. First, nothing guarantees that any student who graduates

¹² MARADMIN 6880, retrieved from website, URL: <www.usmc.mil>. 16 Dec 2008.

from EWS will attend Command and Staff College because attendance is determined through a selection board process. Second, Command and Staff College awards its graduates of the resident course a Master's of Military Studies (MMS) degree,¹³ whereas a partnership with a University like Webster would allow students to choose a degree program that fits them and that translates better to the world outside of the military.

Cost Effectiveness

An increase in civilian personnel and other resources that would be required to institute an accreditation program is not worth the additional cost. To the contrary, because the Marine Corps University places such a high value on education and accreditation at the field grade level, additional resources should be an easily acceptable price to pay at the captain's level. Education is not just a field grade requirement.

American Council on Education

The American Council on Education (ACE) Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services is used by postsecondary institutions to quantify and record a

¹³ Marine Corps University Catalog: Academic Year 2008-2009: 40.

student's successful completion of a unit of study.¹⁴ Many argue that ACE is already a type of accreditation program, and EWS is already an ACE participant. However, ACE is only a recommendation, and credits do not transfer to a specific degree program. For example, ACE recommends a total of 12 credits at the graduate degree level for EWS, But not all 12 credits can be transferred to one specific degree program. Moreover, even if a school accepted the ACE recommendation, it may choose to only take 6 of the recommended 12 credits for the degree program that you choose. Therefore, ACE is not a valid replacement for a graduate level accreditation program.

Two Standards

If the nonresident program is not good enough to get college credit but it is good enough to be PME complete for promotion purposes, then what does this say about Marine Corps standards? This is a false dilemma argument. Accreditation as discussed in this paper is not an either or question. The Marine Corps should grant credentials to students who have earned them. The fact that one portion of the captain population cannot be credentialed should not prohibit the other group from consideration.

¹⁴ The Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services. American Council on Education, link, URL: <<http://militaryguides.acenet.edu>>, accessed 09 December 2008.

The standard for promotion is that students be PME complete, not that students be credentialed. The basic material taught to both groups of students is the same in concept. However, the methodology used at the resident course provides students with an education that the nonresident course cannot compare with. One must acknowledge that 9 months of classroom instruction far outweighs ?? months of 2 hour classes once a week.

Furthermore, using Command and Staff College as the Marine Corps standard on PME and accreditation, only graduates of the resident Command and Staff College are eligible for the Military Studies Master's Degree. Nonresident students receive a certificate of completion only, which does make them eligible for promotion. If the resident course receives accreditation, one can reasonably expect that the next step is to look into the same process for the nonresident course. Thus, while the nonresident course is a consideration, it is most definitely not a reason not to provide accreditation for the resident course.

Conclusion

The disparity in the quality of instruction between the resident and nonresident courses is hardly disputable, as the resident course has a dedicated 9 month block in which to

educate its students. Because of this disparity as well as the Marine Corps University's responsibility to educate (not train) its students, steps should be taken to provide EWS graduates with graduate level credits towards specific degrees. While education for the sake of education is good, guaranteed credits towards a degree are tangible and provide an educational benefit. Although the accreditation process is something that may take several years to instate, MCU already understands the process. The question is why it has not been deemed important enough at the career course level to institute an accreditation program. After all, the stance of Expeditionary Warfare School is that 75% of the school's curriculum is education, and only 25% is training.¹⁵ Given this stance, the accreditation process seems to be an obvious and logical next step toward providing captains with higher level education.

Word count: 2400

¹⁵LtCol Michael Palermo, EWS Chief Instructor, interview by the author, 17 Dec 2008.

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